

Cliffnotes, June 20, 2000

by Chance

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For AT, I miss you.

*

"Hi! Watcha eatin'?" a small voice piped up near her elbow.

Surprised, she looked down and met the smiling blue eyes of a grinning toddler. He was all of three maybe, with light blond hair a little on the long side, a pair of khaki colored shorts with pockets on the sides that seemed to be the big style lately and a small T-shirt with a big picture of Yoda on the front, obviously a hand me down from the signs of stress and the cracks running through the picture. He continued to smile up at her and she couldn't help but smile back and glance up at her husband to see him smiling as well.

They had decided to cut work for the day and take an early lunch at their favorite caf  on the waterfront. The day was beautiful, with a clear blue sky, the sun shining down and neither too hot nor too cold. Was it any wonder they'd snuck out early? They had just been served their food and were about to dig in when the boy had wandered over and surprised them.

"Um, what did you say?" she asked, looking around to see if anyone seemed to be missing a child.

"I asked what you were eatin'." He pulled out a chair and sat down at the table with them. "I'm Lucas and I'm three-years-old. I'm eatin' a hot dog, see?" Lucas held the partially eaten hot dog out to be inspected, ketchup dripping off the end of it in long dollops. He took a big bite and grinned at them, ketchup smeared all over his chin.

"Well yes, and it looks like it's a good hot dog," Marc said, biting back the laughter he could feel bubbling up inside him. "In fact, I think I'll have one of those next time we come here. Sounds good, doesn't it Sarah?"

She rolled her eyes and leaned over to Lucas, whispering conspiratorially into his ear, "I swear, if I let him he'd eat nothing, but junk food all day. And he wonders why we have to shop in the bigger sizes for him now."

Lucas covered his mouth with his hand, giggling and glancing over at Marc from the corner of his eye. Marc mock glared at her, getting into the spirit of the day and enjoying the little boy's company.

"So, Lucas, are you here with your mommy and daddy?" Sarah asked still checking out the other customers to search for frantic parents.

Lucas nodded, grinning a ketchupy grin at them. "Uh huh, me and my mommy and daddy and big brother all came here to eat. My daddy just got back from a sea tour, so we all decided to go out and celebrate. Mommy had to go potty and Daddy and Robbie were still tryin' to 'cide what they wanted, so I came over here. I _always_ get a hot dog, they're the best!"

Sarah was just about to suggest that they go look for his parents when a frantic looking man rushed up to the table and scooped Lucas into his arms.

"Lucas James Bridger, how many times have we told you not to wander off? We were very worried," he scolded, hugging the little boy tightly.

Lucas hugged him, leaving ketchup smudges on the older man's "obviously his father- shirt. The man didn't seem to care or notice and just hugged him tighter.

"I'm sorry, Daddy," Lucas said contritely. "I was just talkin' to these people. I wanted to know what she was having, it looks good."

Marc and Sarah grinned at each other, each trying to cover up their expressions when Lucas turned back to them. It wouldn't do to undermine the scared parent's authority in this situation. Next time Lucas might meet someone "not so nice.

"It's okay, Lucas, you, me and Mommy will talk about this later." He turned to the couple sitting at the table. "I'm sorry about this, Lucas likes to meet people. It seems every time we go out anymore he's made a new friend. I'm Nathan Bridger by the way." He shifted Lucas to his hip and held a hand out to Marc and then Sarah.

"Marc Clayton and this is my wife, Sarah."

Sarah smiled warmly and shook Lucas' hand as well, earning a small smile from the little boy. "It's very nice to meet you, and believe me, Lucas was no trouble. We enjoyed our talk, didn't we, Honey?

Marc nodded. "Definitely, and he's got great taste in food." Lucas laughed and Marc winked at him, earning a laugh from Nathan as well.

"That he does," Nathan replied, smiling. "Now I'd better get back before my wife has the MPs out looking for us. Thank you again." With that he carried Lucas away, the kid waving at them over his father's back.

Sarah and Marc waved back and returned to their food, but not before Marc had signaled the waiter and ordered a hot dog of his own. Sarah rolled her eyes at him but held her tongue; some battles just weren't worth fighting.

"You know, Honey," Marc said after he'd finished his hot dog. "I think it's time we started thinking about a family, don't you?"

She smiled, snorting in laughter around a full mouth. She'd been trying to convince him for months that they were ready to start a family, but he'd been holding out in favor of waiting another year until they had bought a house in the suburbs instead of the apartment they lived in now.

"Well, if you really want to," she said slowly, fighting to keep the smile off her face. Marc was staring off into the distance and she turned to see what he was looking at.

There was Lucas and Nathan, standing with a woman who had her arm around a darker haired older boy, who bore a resemblance to Nathan.

They watched as the family finished paying the bill and walked out into the sunlight, continuing on down the boardwalk until they were lost from sight.

"Yeah," Marc finally said, meeting his wife's smiling face, "I really want to."

End
file.